

HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE AFV SCHOOL BUS PROPOSAL
SUBMITTED UNDER THE STATE ENERGY PROGRAM
FY 2004 SPECIAL PROJECTS SOLICITATION

Introduction

In 2004, the United States Department of Energy (DOE) is offering states the opportunity to apply for funding for a variety of Special Projects under its State Energy Program (SEP) solicitation. DOE is inviting states to submit applications to implement specific DOE Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy activities and projects, including those involving alternative fuel school buses and refueling infrastructure. States will compete for funding to implement the activities. The following discusses writing an effective application under the solicitation for alternative fuel school buses and infrastructure.

Applications are solicited under the State Energy Program FY 2004 Special Projects Solicitation. The complete solicitation can be downloaded from the IIPS Web site at <http://e-center.doe.gov>.

In all instances, if any information in this publication conflicts with information provided in the solicitation, then the information in the solicitation overrides any statements made herein.

Clean Cities

Under “**Projects that Deploy Alternative Fuel School Buses and Refueling Infrastructure**” funding is available in support of DOE’s Energy Smart Schools initiative by paying for the incremental cost of alternative fuel school buses and the cost of associated new refueling infrastructure or additional refueling equipment or upgrades. School buses and related infrastructure projects must be submitted as a combined proposal. Alternative fuel school buses in this category must use emissions certified engines. DOE has particular interest in funding larger projects (5 or more new alternative fuel buses going to one location), as well as expansion projects where additional AFV buses are being acquired to grow existing AFV fleets. DOE is interested in funding projects up to \$200,000 per project. A non-federal cost share of 20% is required, with 20% of this amount in cash.

How Applications Are Submitted

Under the SEP Special Projects Solicitation, all applications are submitted by the state energy office (SEO) or its equivalent, for the state in which the project will occur. Active Clean Cities participants are eligible to submit applications, which must be routed through their local Clean Cities coordinator and then through the state for consideration. The SEO will have specific guidelines, rules and deadlines for submitting applications. Consult them early in the process to determine critical deadlines, and procedures. Below is a list of Web sites that provide key contacts for application preparation.

Clean Cities Coordinators: www.ccities.doe.gov/contacts/ccoord.cgi
DOE HQ & Regional Office contacts: www.ccities.doe.gov/contacts/regional.shtml
State Energy Office contacts: www.naseo.org/members/states.html

The following are answers to frequently asked questions about working with SEOs and Clean Cities coordinators on SEP Special Projects applications.

Who is my state's 'point of contact'?

- ❑ States often have different people reviewing and supervising different categories of the solicitation. Before organizing a project, call your state energy office to find out the name of person with whom you and the coordinator will work. To find your state energy office (or its equivalent) go to www.naseo.org/members/states.html.

What is the state's procedure for submitting an application?

- ❑ Applications submitted under the SEP Special Projects Solicitation are from the state itself and not the individual partners in the project. Many states have a formal process, which requires them to review the project you intend to propose. When working with your state energy office get details about the review process and associated timelines.

What assistance will the state energy office provide in completing the application?

- ❑ Often states will provide technical or staff assistance with applications, but this varies from state to state. Ask your SEO contact specifics about the specific kinds of assistance available.

What federal forms do I need to submit to the state energy office with my application?

- ❑ Some states complete the required federal forms for each project, since it is actually the state applying for the grant. Others may require the applicants to complete the forms and the state will include them in the application package. Forms can be downloaded from the IIPS Web site at <http://e-center.doe.gov>. Determine what your responsibilities are early so you won't face any last minute surprises.

What are the deadlines for submitting SEP Special Projects application?

- ❑ State energy offices will require that applications be submitted to them early to allow time for state-level review. Refer to the submittal flow chart (See Figure 1) and pencil in the deadlines for each step. Verify your particular state's deadline for receiving applications for SEP. In many states, you can get the process started by submitting a letter of intent or an abstract describing your project to the state energy office early. If you have been communicating with the SEO ahead of time, you may have greater flexibility as to when your completed final application package must be submitted for their review.

Will the state or the Clean Cities Coalition I'm working with keep any of the DOE funding for management of the project?

- ❑ Some (but not all) states or coalitions require a management or administrative fee—usually a percentage of the funding obtained from DOE. This may affect the amount of funding you'll need to request. Ask your state energy office and local Clean Cities coordinator if there are any fees that will be retained by them and what services or tasks they will complete in return

for those fees.

Lastly, cooperate with the state energy office as much as possible because it can be an invaluable asset. Remember that ultimately, this is the state's application and they do not have to submit it if it does not meet their criteria.

What Are the Qualities of an Outstanding SEP Special Projects Application?

There are several qualities that make a good AFV school bus application even better. The evaluation criteria included in the solicitation clearly outline what qualities in an application will receive extra consideration. Here are some rules of thumb that will help you develop a high quality application.

The best applications are complete and easy to understand.

- ❑ They include a succinct but thorough description of the project, and address the criteria outlined in the solicitation.
- ❑ The project summary and project narratives are well thought out and it is easy for the reviewers to determine what will be funded.
- ❑ The application fully describes all aspects of the AFV program (vehicle acquisition, fueling, maintenance, training, driver education, etc.)

Partners have a demonstrated ability to complete the project.

- ❑ Partners include the local Clean Cities Coalition that is vibrant and active
- ❑ Partners are highly visible in the alternative fuels industry and/or have a history of completing similar projects.
- ❑ Partners include a mix of organizations, including school district(s), fuel provider, Clean Cities Coalition, the state energy office, and other local government entities.
- ❑ The required letters of commitment by all the partners specifically spell out their financial commitment and they express a tone of excitement about the project, and the types of commitment are spelled out in specific language.

The best applications define specific, measurable goals.

- ❑ Project narrative describes the number, and type of alternative fuel buses to be purchased and dates they'll be delivered. Infrastructure is also clearly described and defined, along with the projected number of AFVs/buses that will use the facility.
- ❑ Project narrative describes the energy security benefits as indicated by the estimated amount of alternative fuel that will be dispensed at the stations introduced as a result of this project.
- ❑ A realistic date of completion is included in the goals.

Especially favorable are projects that expand an existing, viable AFV program.

- ❑ Project narrative includes a description of how the project will expand and leverage resources of an existing AFV program that is successful.
- ❑ They include the purchase of 5 or more vehicles for the same site

Fueling infrastructure that will serve the vehicles to be purchased is identified.

- If existing fueling infrastructure is to be used, describe its capacity

Applications that are part of a multi-user consortium to buy a quantity of vehicles are given extra consideration. This may include:

- Applications that include a number of school districts in a single state participating in a single project to allow discounts on vehicles purchased that may be participating in a special factory sponsor group purchase plan.

Projects that include more cost share than required.

- These projects leverage more resources and therefore achieve more results for the money provided.
 - All applications that meet the minimum required cost share will be evaluated on the quality and value of the cost share.
 - The sources, amounts, and types of cost sharing are made clear in the project narrative and throughout the application.

What causes a proposal to be rejected?

A few critical factors will cause an application to be rejected. When developing your application, be careful not to make these common mistakes.

- **Applications that do not meet the minimum cost share requirements.** If applications submitted do not meet the 20% cost sharing requirement (with 20% of that being cash), they will be rejected as non-responsive.
- **Applications that lack letters of commitment from partners.** All partners in the project must provide a letter of commitment describing what kinds of products, services, and financial support they will contribute to the project. A letter that merely states that the partner “supports” the project is not sufficient.
- **Applications that request more funding than allowed in the solicitation.** DOE specifically states that for 2004 their portion of funding for projects cannot exceed \$200,000. Applications that request more than \$200,000 in DOE funding will not be considered.
- **Applications that request funding to pay for alternative fuel.** Applications that request DOE to pay either for alternative fuel in total or the incremental cost of alternative fuel will not be considered.
- **Applications that lack the properly completed cover page.** A cover page template is part of the Clean Cities solicitations. The information required on this page allows the reviewers to quickly assess the details of the project. Applications that lack the specified information will not be considered.
- **Applications that lack the properly completed forms.** All the forms specified in the solicitation must be completed and accompany the application or it will not be

considered. Remember that the state may have some forms on file or might complete some forms for you.

Consult the solicitation and work with your SEO to ensure your application is complete.

How to Organize the Project

There are several steps proposers can take when planning and organizing a project that will help ensure a high-quality application is submitted. Depending on the circumstances surrounding the project, determine which of the steps below you need to take.

Be an Active Member of a Clean Cities Organization

To be eligible to apply for SEP funding, you must be an active member of a local Clean Cities Coalition.

Contact Your State Energy Office

Contact the state energy office to determine whom you'll need to work with, the state's specific requirements and deadlines, state funding requirements for project management, etc. If possible, you'll want to engage the person from the state responsible for submitting applications in the remainder of the planning process for the developing the application.

Develop an Outline

Develop a written outline of the basic concepts of the project, including measurable goals and objectives. The person spearheading the application process should develop a basic outline of the project. The outline should identify potential project goals and objectives, partners, timeline, cost sharing and other key elements and have a strategy to address all the criteria defined in the solicitation.

Project Narrative

The project narrative should include:

- ☐ How many school buses will be deployed and where they'll be used.
- ☐ Refueling infrastructure components, including an estimated fuel use sales, projected number of AFVs/buses that will use the facility, where there is shared fleet or public access provisions for the station.
- ☐ Energy security benefits. Gallons of gasoline and/or/diesel fuel displaced by the the AFV buses annually and over the life of the buses.
- ☐ A description of how the purchase of the AFV buses will improve public awareness of alternative fuels within the community.
- ☐ A statement of how this project fits into the longer-term plans for the AFV program at the school district and the community.
- ☐ Probability of success based on partners track record with similar projects
- ☐ How the project will improve the position and mission of the Clean Cities organization.

Partners

The project outline should identify all the partners who will participate to make the project successful, including the school district where the buses will be utilized, the local Clean Cities organization, the fuel provider, the bus engine and vehicle manufacturers, training and educational institutions providing training, the state energy office, and any other participating entities. Describe the track record of prospective grantees and the status and results of previous grants.

Timeline

A realistic description of the time frames for completing various phases of the project should be mapped out. This may require some research into school district budget cycles, ordering cycles for vehicles, ordering/construction cycles for fueling stations and other schedules.

Cost Sharing

First, a draft budget for the complete project should be roughed out. It should include the cost of traditionally fueled buses and the incremental cost of the alternative fuel optional equipment, any fueling station equipment or upgrades that may be provided as part of cost sharing, training necessary for maintenance technicians, drivers and/or fuelers, public relations events or outreach activities that will announce the addition of the buses to the fleet, signage for buses and/or fueling stations and any other costs that will be related to the project.

Next, identify from among the partners the potential sources of the required 20% match, remembering that at least 20% of that must be in cash. Clearly identify what funding portion you are requesting from US DOE.

An example:

Item/Description	Total Cost	Cost Share	Source	Type
Base cost of 6 new school buses	\$ 506,088	\$ 506,088	School District	Cash
Incremental cost of 6 CNG school buses	\$ 187,147		US DOE	Cash
CNG Fueling Station	\$ 275,000	\$ 275,000	ABC Fueling	Cash
Public Relations Event	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000	School District	In-Kind
Operator and Maintenance Training	\$ 20,000	\$ 20,000	Bus / Vehicle Manufacturer	In-Kind
Signage for buses	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	School District	In-Kind

Total Project Cost	\$1,008,235		% of Total	% Cash
Total Cost Share		\$821,088	81%	
Total Cash Contribution	\$781,088			95%
Funding Requested From US DOE	\$ 187,147		19%	

Meet with All Partners, Especially the Clean Cities Coordinator

Once the basic outline for the project has been developed, the proposers should meet with all the potential partners in the project to discuss and refine the project and obtain their commitment. You'll also need to identify their participation in terms of cost sharing, which must equal at least 20% of the total project value.

Draft the Basic Elements of the Project and Tasks to Complete It

During the meeting(s) with partners and players, you'll want to utilize the application format to help guide discussions that will outline all the basic elements of the project.

Estimate the Timeline for Completing the Project

Once the tasks for the project have been outlined, you'll need to estimate the timeline for completing each task. This timeline will need to be reviewed and agreed upon by all the partners involved in the project, especially the vehicle manufacturers who will be providing vehicles

Estimate Costs

Estimate costs associated, including labor, equipment, travel and other costs. All costs associated with the project will need to be identified, including the cost of project management, vehicles, equipment, advertising, training, etc.

Obtain Letters of Commitment from All Partners

All the partners **must** submit a letter of commitment that identifies what tangible items (vehicles or other equipment, training programs, facilities, etc.) they will be contributing to the project. Since it often takes several days—even a couple of weeks—for some organizations to provide these letters, you'll want to get an early start on them.

How to Write the Application

The FY 2004 SEP Special Projects solicitation includes the guidelines for what each application

must contain and what applications will be given extra consideration. The AFV School Bus Template, which accompanies this tutorial, includes a pre-formatted version of a Microsoft Excel 2000 template for the application, including the appropriate forms.

If you choose not to use the template, make sure your application includes each item listed in the solicitation under **Application Content**.

How to Submit the Application

Check with your State Energy Office to determine if they want the application submitted electronically and in hard copy. Be careful to include the correct number of copies that meet the SEO requirements (stapled, clipped etc.)

Completing the Required Forms

Contact your state energy office to determine exactly which forms they want you to complete. The state energy office may be willing to complete some of the forms as a part of their submission or they may already have some forms on file with DOE. All required forms can be found in MS Word format at **<http://e-center.doe.gov>**.

Some of the information requested in the forms must reflect the fact that the application is being submitted on behalf of the state energy office. Remember, these are general federal forms which are used for a wide variety of grant applications.

Standard Form 424: Application for Federal Assistance

This form is required from your SEO. They may already have a process in place to complete them. Check with them before completing the forms.

If you need to complete the forms, it is relatively easy with your budget information. Data from the state energy office is required.

- **Box 1 - Type of Submission**, Application, Non-construction should be checked since this is a new application and does not involve construction.
- **Box 2 - Date Submitted**, insert the date the application is completed. If you wish, you may establish an identifier number or word to clearly identify the application.
- **Box 3 - Date Received by State**, leave blank. The state will complete this part, if appropriate.
- **Box 4 - Date Received by Federal Agency**, leave blank.
- **Box 5 - Applicant Information**, legal name of applicant--remember this is the state's application. For example, State of California. The organizational unit will be the name of the state's energy office—for example, California Energy Commission. The address is the energy office's address. Name and telephone number of the person to be contacted should be the person you are dealing with at your state's energy office.
- **Box 6 - Employer Identification Number**, you need to obtain the state's number if you are completing the form for them.

- **Box 7 - Type of Applicant**, enter A, this is the state's application.
- **Box 8 - Type of Application**, check New since this is a new application.
- **Box 9 - Name of Federal Agency**, enter U.S. Department of Energy.
- **Box 10 - Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number**, enter 81-119, Title: State Energy Program Special Projects (This is found on the first page of the solicitation).
- **Box 11 - Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project**, include a very brief description of the proposed project, including the proposing organization's name.
- **Box 12 - Areas Affected by Project**, includes any areas, which will be directly affected by the project.
- **Box 13 - Proposed Project Start and Ending Date**, enter the start and ending date of your project.
- **Box 14 - Congressional Districts of a. Applicant** (remember, the entire state for applicant so, if you have 12 congressional districts in the state this should reflect 1 through 12); **and b. Project** (which congressional district, or districts, does the project cover?).
- **Box 15 - Estimated Funding** - The funding for these categories should be derived from your Proposed Cost Share table in your SEP grant. **Box a. Federal**, should include the funding you are requesting from US DOE. **Box b. Applicant**, is left blank. **Box c. State** is any personnel and/or funding that the state is contributing towards the project. **Box d. Local**, is the contributions from local school district and other local contributors. This can include personnel and cash contributions towards the purchase of school busses. **Box e. Other** and **Box f. Program Income** are left blank. **Box g. Total**, is the total cost of the proposed project.
- **Box 16 - Is Application Subject to Review by State Executive Order 12372 Process?** should be determined by contacting your state energy office.
- **Box 17 - Is the Applicant Delinquent on Any Federal Debt?**, should be determined by contacting your state energy office. Generally most states are not delinquent in any debt.
- **Box 18 - Authorized Representative**, should be determined by contacting your state energy office. Ask who from your state is the authorized representative for signing applications is, their title and their telephone number. Insert these in the appropriate boxes. The Date Signed box may be left blank for the signor to complete if you are uncertain when it will be signed.

Form DOE F 4600.4 - Federal Assistance Budget Information Form

Again, DOE needs this form from the SEO. Check with them before completing the form.

This form will require you to transfer data from the budget contained in your application to the form and to arrange it into specific categories.

In **Section 1**, insert the project or program number if one has been assigned—if not, leave this

section blank.

Section 2 should include a brief project title, which you should develop.

Section 3 contains the grant contact information, which is the name and address of the project contact at the state energy office.

Section 4 and **Section 5** require the start and completion date for the project. You will want to use a reasonable start date for the project. To help determine this date, contact the state energy office staff to determine if an award is made to the state in July of the current year, when you could reasonably expect a sub-award be made to your organization. This may take 2-3 months, depending on the process the state is required to follow.

Also, allow sufficient time to complete the project. Factor in the time to conduct the bid processes, as well as a reasonable time for expected delivery of the school busses. It should be noted that it is much easier to establish a longer, more reasonable timeline in the beginning than to request an extension if unexpected circumstances cause a project to be uncompleted during the estimated time frame.

Now you are ready to actually begin **Section A** - the Budget Summary. The grant program function or activity is: State Energy Program. The federal catalog number, found on the solicitation, is: 81.119. Since this is a new project, there are no Estimated Unobligated Funds. You can now move directly to the New or Revised Budget section. The Federal funds requested in your application are entered in column (e). All non-federal funds that you are providing, including cash, third party match, etc., are entered in column (f). The total project cost is entered in column (g). A total of each column is made across the bottom of this section in line 6.

Once Section A is completed, you are ready to begin **Section B**, Budget Categories, the detailed budget. Directly under the statement “Grant Program Function or Activity” are four columns. Each column should be labeled to reflect funding sources, i.e. (1) Federal Funds (2) State Funds (3) XYZ School District. Then, the budget, broken down into the categories listed on the Object Class Category column should be entered, as appropriate, under each heading. Assuming that the federal funds requested will be entirely used for equipment (and a request of \$100,000 is being made), the \$100,000 would be placed under column (1), Federal Funds, line d., Equipment. No other federal fund uses exist so there are no other entries in the Federal Funds column.

Line i., Total Direct Charges reflects the \$100,000. There are no Indirect Charges so this is left blank and line k., TOTALS reflects again the \$100,000.

This is repeated for each funding source. If the state is providing non-federally funded personnel support, this may be reflected as a contribution with the amounts entered under rows a. and b. of column (2). If the School District is providing non-federally funded personnel support it is also entered on rows a. and b. in column (3). Additionally, if the school district is providing \$350,000 in cash support toward the base prices of the busses to be acquired, then these funds are also entered under column (3) on line d. Equipment. Again, the totals for each column are entered on lines i. and k., appropriately.

Finally, to complete the form, column (5) is completed adding each column together to achieve a total for each Object Class Category. Column (5), line i. and k. should reflect the total value of the project.

Figure 1 - SEP Grant Flow Process

